Ray back in prison after Stokes grilling

James Earl Ray was back behind bars this week and, barring a miracle when his congressional "trial" resumes in November, appears destined to serve his full 99 - year sentence for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The House Assassinations Committee — headed by a black chairman — took Ray out of his Tennessee prison and gave him the public forum he has sought for years to plead his innocence despite a formal confession of guilt. But it also revealed new evidence that Ray and his lawyer, Mark Lane, found "most damaging."

Two surprise developments last Friday dealt severe blows to Ray's claim — a retired British policeman's statement that Ray boasted of murdering Dr. King shortly after his arrest in London in 1968, and another witness admission that his support of Ray's alibi was fabricated.

Lane responded angrily to the written statement from the policeman, saying he understood the officer had been charged with corruption and fired in disgrace. That forced an abrupt delay until November in further questioning of Ray.

Scotland Yard later said the officer — Alexander Anthony Fist,

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CONGRESSIONAL HUDDLE — Rep. Louis Stokes, D - Ohio, chairman of the House Assassinations Committee, considers an objection by James Earl Ray's attorney, Mark Lane. Behind Stokes is Del. Walter Fauntroy, D - D.C. and another member of the assassinations panel.

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now a pub owner — was found innocent of corruption in a trial earlier this year.

The presentation of the "most damaging" evidence against the stony - faced Ray came the day after Louis Stokes, D - Ohio, committee chairman, charged that Ray stalked Dr. King across the country for 12 days preceding Dr. King's murder on April 4, 1968 in Memphis.

Ray insistantly denied he tried to hunt down Dr. King — although evidence showed his movments followed Dr. King.

When Ray reappears before the committee in November, questioning is expected to focus on whether he was part of a conspiracy rather than a lone killer. The committee holds hearings in September on conspiracy theories about the killing of President John F. Kennedy.

Ray will have much to ponder after three days of hearings that produced:

— Testimony that he left Los Angeles in 1968 and, parallelling Dr. King's movements, went to Selma, Ala., Atlanta, and finally to Memphis, Tenn., where the Nobel Peace prize winner was killed by a bullet from the rifle Ray admits he bought.

— Evidence that Ray was in Atlanta on April 1, 1968.

In an outburst that made his lawyer wince, Ray told the committee, — in what sounded like a sarcastic quip — if anyone could show he was in Atlanta April 1, "I'll just take responsibility for the King case right here on TV."

The committee produced a woman, now 75, who said from a wheelchair that she had made out laundry and dry